Catalogue no. 81-599-X — Issue no. 005
ISSN: 1709-8653
ISBN: 978-1-100-15754-2

Fact Sheet

Education Indicators in Canada

Interrupting High School and Returning to Education

April 2010

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Interrupting High School and Returning to Education

A person without a high-school diploma has very limited opportunities to contribute in today's society and economy. Not completing high school represents a great loss to society and the individual. A variety of second-chance programs have been developed by provincial/territorial education ministries to offer possibilities to young adults who have left high school to complete their diplomas at older ages.

This fact sheet looks at the proportion of young adults who have left high school without a diploma and, among them, at the proportions who have returned to obtain a high-school diploma and who progressed to postsecondary education. Knowing about the progress of these students helps us to take their needs into consideration and understand the value of second-chance programs.

What proportion ever left high school?

Looking at Canada as a whole, between 1999 and 2007, among the young adults who were followed by the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS),[1] 17% had interrupted their high school education at some point, mostly before the age of 18 to 20. This represents almost 210,000 high-school students who left high school somewhere along the way.

Although getting them back on track is not necessarily easy and requires investment, the data indicate that provincial/territorial second-chance programs are successful. By the ages of 26 to 28, only 6% of the YITS cohort still had not graduated from high school and had no further education (Table 1). The remaining 11% had returned and either completed high school or entered postsecondary education.

In the provinces, 20% or more of young adults in Quebec, Manitoba, and Alberta indicated that they had interrupted their high-school education at some point (Table 1). By December 2007, however, the proportion with no high-school diploma and no further education in these provinces had dropped to only 7 or 8% (Table 1). The remaining 12 or 13% eventually returned and completed a high-school diploma, or participated in a postsecondary program without first graduating from high school. This attests to the importance of second-chance opportunities offered in these provinces, although they still had the highest proportions of young adults without a high-school diploma at the ages of 26 to 28 years.

1. The Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) followed a cohort of young people for a period of eight years, from the time they were 18 to 20 years old in 1999, through to 2007, when they were 26 to 28 years old.

Table 1

Percentage of 26- to 28-year-old cohort[1] who had ever left high school, compared with the percentage who had not obtained a high-school diploma (or higher) by December 2007, Canada and provinces[2]

	Ever left high school	No high-school diploma and no postsecondary education	Difference[3]
	percentage of 26- to 28-year-old cohort		percent
Canada[4]	**17.3**	**6.0**	**11.3**
Newfoundland and Labrador	8.3 E	F	..
Prince Edward Island	F	F	..
Nova Scotia	12.1	4.9 E	7.2 E
New Brunswick	9.7 E	F	..
Quebec	22.6	8.3	14.3
Ontario	14.8	4.1	10.7
Manitoba	20.8	7.4 E	13.4 E
Saskatchewan	12.7	4.0 E	8.7 E
Alberta	20.2	7.8 E	12.4 E
British Columbia	16.7	6.4 E	10.3 E

.. not available for a specific reference period

E use with caution

F too unreliable to be published

1. The cohort is representative of Canadians who were aged 18 to 20 as of December 1999 (Cycle 1 of the Youth in Transition Survey, or YITS). However, because of changes over time in the population of young adults in Canada, primarily due to immigration and emigration, this group does not represent a cross-section of the overall population aged 26 to 28 in December 2007.
2. Province in which high school was last attended; further analysis indicates that the incidence of interprovincial migration among respondents who had ever left high school is low, less than 1%.
3. Percentage of the 26- to 28-year-old cohort who had ever left high school and who had returned and obtained a high-school diploma or higher (including those who were still pursuing high-school education as of December 2007).
4. Respondents who did not attend elementary or high school in Canada at all, or who last attended high school in the United States or another country, are not included in this table. Respondents who reported last attending high school in one of the territories are reflected in the total for Canada, but the territories are not shown separately due to small sample sizes.

Notes: All data reflect the situation of this 26- to 28-year-old cohort at the end of December 2007.

YITS asks respondents if they have ever dropped out of elementary or secondary school. However, it is not possible to differentiate those who dropped out of elementary school from those who dropped out of secondary school. Further analysis, based on the age at which respondents last attended school, indicates that the number of respondents who dropped out of elementary school is very small.

Source: Statistics Canada, Youth in Transition Survey, Cycle 5.

In Canada as a whole, men were more likely than women to have left high school early: 19% compared to 16% (Table E.1.6). The gender gap is significant in Quebec, where 28% of men had left high school at some point, compared to 17% of women.

What proportion progressed to postsecondary education?

High-school leavers can follow various pathways back into education. While some may return to high school and graduate, and then possibly go on to pursue postsecondary education, others may undertake postsecondary education without first obtaining their high-school credential.

In the group of 26- to 28-year-olds who had interrupted their high-school education at some point, over half (55%) later returned and obtained their high-school diploma. One-third carried on and participated in postsecondary education. An additional 9% participated in postsecondary education without having obtained their high-school diploma (Table 2).

Table 2

Educational status of a cohort of 26- to 28-year-olds[1] who had ever left high school, Canada, December 2007

	Total	Postsecondary status	
		Attended postsecondary institution	Did not attend postsecondary institution
		percent	
High school status			
Graduates	55	34	21
Non-graduates	43	9	34
Attending school	2	F	2
Total	100	43	56

F too unreliable to be published

1. This cohort is representative of Canadians who were aged 18 to 20 as of December 1999 (Cycle 1 of the Youth in Transition Survey, or YITS). However, because of changes over time in the population of young adults in Canada, primarily due to immigration and emigration, this group does not represent a cross-section of the overall population aged 26 to 28 in December 2007.

Notes: Data in this table reflect the situation of this cohort at the end of December 2007.

Postsecondary education includes education toward a certificate, diploma, or degree beyond high school, where the credential takes three months or more to complete.

Source: Statistics Canada, Youth in Transition Survey, Cycle 5.

This fact sheet illustrates that over the longer term, a majority of young people complete high school or participate in postsecondary education. Further research on the types of postsecondary institutions and programs pursued by early high-school leavers would be of interest, including mechanisms such as prior-learning assessment and adult upgrading programs. This highlights the importance of following the education pathways of young adults to better understand the challenges they face and the progress they make.

To obtain more information about the Youth in Transition Survey (YITS), the data source used for this fact sheet, please visit the "Definitions, data sources and methods" section of the Statistics Canada Web site (www.statcan.gc.ca), survey number 4435. For more detailed information on the specific data referred to in this fact sheet, please see the accompanying tables, Tables E.1.4 to E.1.6.

In many cases, small sample sizes for the provinces limit the analysis that could be done at the provincial level.

For other tables related to education in Canada and other fact sheets that address education issues, please see Education Indicators in Canada: Report of the Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Program (http://www.statcan.gc.ca/bsolc/olc-cel/olc-cel?lang=eng&catno=81-582-X). Please note that YITS data previously presented in PCEIP are not comparable with the data used for this fact sheet.

The Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Program (PCEIP) is an ongoing initiative of the Canadian Education Statistics Council, a partnership between Statistics Canada and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), to provide a set of statistical measures on education systems in Canada.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the work of the PCEIP team at Statistics Canada and at the CMEC Secretariat, as well as the assistance of the provincial/territorial members of the Strategic Management Committee of the Canadian Education Statistics Council, in reviewing the material. Thank you also to the Youth in Transition Survey team and the Centre for Education Statistics at Statistics Canada for providing the data.